

Nicolay N. Miklouho-Maclay – A Great Humanist, Scientist, and Explorer

Paul Horley, Ukraine

THE YEAR 2006 MARKS the 160th anniversary of the birth of the prominent Russian scientist, Nikolay Nikolaevich Miklouho-Maclay. Born on July 17, 1846, in the village of Rozhdestvenskoe (Novgorod province), he was educated in the Universities of St. Petersburg, Heidelberg, and Leipzig, and studied zoology and comparative anatomy in Jena (Putilov 1983:305). He first participated in a scientific expedition in his twenties. After visiting the Canary Islands, Morocco, Gibraltar and Spain, Miklouho-Maclay then turned his attention to New Guinea.

At that time, New Guinea was poorly studied and there was a lack of knowledge about the native culture, which was in danger of disappearing before being described and studied. This situation urged the young explorer to begin an investigation of Papuan aboriginal society prior to contact with the Western world.

At the age of 24, Nikolay boarded the corvette *Vityaz'* (a poetic Russian word for warrior-hero) and sailed from St. Petersburg under the command of Pavel N. Nazimov. The ship anchored at Astrolabe Bay, Northeast Papua New Guinea, on September 20, 1871.

Sailors constructed a small hut that served the scientist both as a home and a storehouse for his collections for the next 15 months following the departure of the ship. While colonizers usually communicated with natives using the language of guns, Nikolay was sure that respect and friendship could establish a trustful contact. Non-intrusive and patient, he gained the friendship of the Papuans. They called him *Kaaram tamo* (the Moon man) in accordance with the local mythology, attributing light skin to the ancestors descending from the Moon (Putilov 1983:315).

Generous and responsive, Miklouho-Maclay always tried to help his new friends, even if ill himself. When the Russian ship *Izumrud* (the Emerald) anchored at Astrolabe Bay on December 19, 1872 to pick up him up, the natives of neighboring villages asked Miklouho-Maclay to stay, promising to build him a house in each village where he had friends, and to give him wives for house-keeping (Putilov 1985:42). But the departure was decided and the Moon man left the shores of New Guinea amidst the loud salutations of the people who gathered to see him off.

Miklouho-Maclay returned to Astrolabe Bay in 1876-7 and 1883. During 1874-80 he also visited Malacca, Micronesia, North Melanesia, and the south shores of New Guinea and Papua Koviari, carrying out detailed ethnological, zoological and geographic investigations. His field notes were illustrated and accompanied with numerous (over 700) skillful drawings, showing people, dwellings, boats, statues, tattoo patterns, ornaments, etc. (Butinov 1954:419). The superior quality of the artwork was confirmed when the ship *Dmitriy Mendeleev* anchored in Astrolabe Bay in 1971, one hundred years after the first visit of Miklouho-Maclay. Talking about

the century-old events, the Papuan elder Tanog recognized the man from the portrait drawn by Miklouho-Maclay, and called that person by a name that coincided with what was written on the drawing (Putilov 1985:252-3).

Miklouho-Maclay gathered huge ethnological collections from all the places he visited, and tried to illustrate different sides of native life and culture. Traveling as a passenger, he sometimes had to change ships *en route* if the circumstances required, thus having no alternative but to voyage apart from his precious collections, but expecting to pick them up later. Alas, some of the collections were lost in this way (Butinov 1954:428).

Despite this, the Miklouho-Maclay collection list includes at least 260 artifacts (Miklouho-Maclay 1954:448-462). Between expeditions, he lived in different places while continuing to work and preparing his papers for publication. One of the brightest periods of his life was connected with Sydney, Australia. During his first visit in 1879, he became a good friend of the famous scientist William Macleay, who also traveled to New Guinea (Putilov 1985:117).

In Sydney, Miklouho-Maclay worked with the collections of the Australian National Museum and began to implement a plan to build a Zoological Field Station in Watson Bay, which could be used as a laboratory for traveling scientists; this project was accomplished in 1881. Sydney was the city where Nikolay met his future wife, Margaret Robertson (Putilov 1985:202-3).

Feeling responsible for the destiny of the people from Astrolabe Bay in connection with the inevitable approaching colonization of New Guinea, Nikolay Nikolaevich began an active struggle for the rights the Papuan people, addressing the highest persons in British and Russian governments.

After long years of absence, he returned to St. Petersburg in 1882 and gave lectures about the islands he visited. Next he headed back to Sydney and married Margaret Robertson, returning to Russia alone in 1886; one year later he returned to Sydney to bring his wife and two children to St. Petersburg (Putilov 1985:232).

During the following years (1886-1888), Miklouho-Maclay focused on a two-volume book that included the results of his vast research. The first volume planned to summarize six trips to the different areas of New Guinea, and the second was expected to cover the voyages to Malacca, Melanesia, Micronesia and Australia.

At the beginning of 1888 the first volume was almost complete and much was completed on the second one, but his illness and untimely death at the age of 42 did not allow him to finish his work.

The papers of Miklouho-Maclay were deposited at the Russian Geographic Society; in 1923 the first volume of his book was finally published. For the centennial anniversary of his birth, it was decided to publish his complete works, which resulted in six books appearing between 1950-54. Two were volumes prepared by Miklouho-Maclay, plus a two-book collection of papers and two volumes of letters, drawings and photos of the collected artifacts.

The immense scientific heritage of Miklouho-Maclay includes a chapter connected with Easter Island. During the

voyage onboard the corvette *Vityaz'*, the young scientist visited the prominent scholars Adolf Bastian, Thomas Huxley and Rodolfo Philippi, who kindled his interest to the unique culture of Easter Island and the recently re-discovered *rongorongo* script. The *Vityaz'* approached Rapa Nui 135 years ago, on June 24, 1871. This took place only a couple of weeks after the forced departure of Father Hippolyte Roussel who left with over 200 islanders, due to the tyranny of Dutrou-Bornier. An onshore visit to the island was canceled, but Miklouho-Maclay gathered information about Rapa Nui culture in a meeting with Roussel and the islanders at Manga-reva on July 7-12 (Tumarkin and Fedorova 1990:110).

When *Vityaz'* anchored for eleven days at Pape'ete, Tahiti, Miklouho-Maclay met with Bishop Tepano Jaussen, and he measured and described the four *rongorongo* tablets in his collection (ibid.:111). Jaussen was so impressed by the knowledge and keen interest of the young scholar that he presented a *rongorongo* tablet to Nikolay.

Still in Tahiti, Miklouho-Maclay began to work on the papers concerning Easter Island and the *rongorongo* script; the manuscripts were finished before his arrival to New Guinea and were sent on with Captain Nazimov to Europe. Both papers were published in 1872 in the journals of the Russian and German Geographic Societies.

The collected works of Miklouho-Maclay feature the six drawings connected with Easter Island: four portraits (a girl with traditional tattoo and three portraits of Rapa Nui men of different ages), and two figures depicting wooden statuettes. During the preparation of this paper the author came across an interesting peculiarity connected with the drawing showing frontal and profile views of a *moai pa'apa'a* (Miklouho-Maclay 1954:41), easily identifiable with the statuette brought to the Santiago National Museum of Natural History by the Chilean corvette *O'Higgins* (Esen-Baur 1989:188-9) in 1870, i.e., just before Miklouho-Maclay's visit to the Museum in May 1871.

According to modern photos, the image featured only one full-size obsidian inlay. It is worth noting that full-size inlays are far less characteristic of Rapa Nui wooden sculpture (e.g. Esen-Baur 1989:179, 245) than the common bone-and-obsidian inlays. In several cases, the sculptures lack inlay, but (to the knowledge of the author) Maclay's drawing of a *moai pa'apa'a* illustrates the only wooden figure featuring two different eye types: large one-piece obsidian right eye and composite bone-and-obsidian left one (Figure 1a, b). This detail could be of an occasional nature and additional studies are required to reveal more information. Nevertheless, it is interesting to highlight the possible parallels between the discussed wooden image and petroglyphs with deliberately mismatched eyes (Figure 1c) from Mata Ngarau, 'Orongo (Lee 1992:57), which possibly depicts one-eyed persons able to see "hidden things" (ibid, note 1, p.128).

Miklouho-Maclay (1954:460-46; Tumarkin and Fedorova 1990:107) collected nine artifacts from Easter Island: two wooden statuettes, a staff (*ua*), an obsidian spear point, a *tahonga*, an elaborate wooden fish head, a pearl shell pendant, and two inscribed tablets.

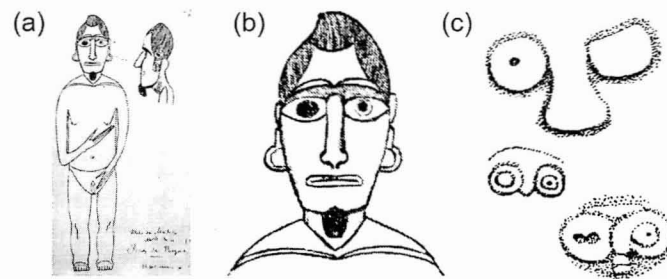


Figure 1. *Moai pa'apa'a* drawn by Miklouho-Maclay in 1871 (after Miklouho-Maclay 1954:41): a) general view, b) head; c) petroglyphs with mismatched eyes (after Lee 1992:59).

The texts of the tablets were discovered to be parallel by Boris Kudryavtsev, which led to further *rongorongo* investigations and contributions made by Dmitriy Ol'derogge, Nikolay Butinov, Yuri Knorozov, Irina Fedorova, and Konstantin Pozdniakov. The small St. Petersburg tablet was the first *rongorongo* item subjected to radiocarbon analysis, yielding the dates of about the beginning of 18th or middle of 19th century (Orliac 2005:118).

The St. Petersburg Institute of Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, was named after him (Putilov 1985:272). Starting in the 20th century, the annual conferences on ethnography were entitled "Maclay Readings". The bright memory of the great humanist and explorer Nikolay Miklouho-Maclay continues to inspire new generations of researchers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is very thankful to Georgia Lee for her kind permission to use the artwork from her book and to Catherine Orliac for the paper about *rongorongo* dating.

REFERENCES

- Butinov, N. A. 1954. Drawings and Collections of N. N. Miklouho-Maclay, Vol. 5:419-429. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Esen-Baur H. M. ed. 1989. *1500 Jahre Kultur der Osterinsel*. Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern.
- Lee, G. 1992. *Rock art of Easter Island*. Los Angeles: UCLA Institute of Archaeology.
- Miklouho-Maclay, N. N. 1954. *Collected Works. Vol.5: Drawings and Ethnographic Collections*. Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka.
- Orliac, C. 2005. The rongorongo tablets from Easter Island: botanical identification and ¹⁴C dating. *Archaeol. Oceania* 40:115-119.
- Putilov, B. N. 1985. *N. N. Miklouho-Maclay*, Moscow: Progress.
- Putilov, B. N. ed. 1983. *The Moon Man*. Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya.
- Tumarkin D. D. and I. K. Fedorova. 1990. Nicolai Miklouho-Maclay and Easter Island. *Pacific Studies* 13:103-117.